

Chairman Kevin J. Martin  
FCC (Federal Communications Commission)  
445 - 12th Street SW  
Washington, DC 20554

05-231

re: Closed Captioning Frustrations

cc: Commissioner Kathleen Abernathy; Customer Service;

01/25/06

Dear Chairman Martin:

I have been wondering for some time, now, why in this modern age of American Disabilities Act there is a great inconsistency of TV stations offering closed captioning and/or closed captioning that is readable.

My experience is that the worst offenders are: a) Channel 20, WYCC Chicago City Colleges Public TV Station; b) Fox News Chicago, Channel 32; c) CBS Chicago - Channel 2. Middle of the road are: WGN Channel 9 Chicago, NBC Channel 5 Chicago and WTTW Channel 11 Public Television Chicago. When I click on "-0- volume" and "mute" while watching WTTW, for instance, the closed captioning will then begin, but it may or may not be readable, or it may not come up at all. WGN usually offers it, but many, many times it is not readable. Most exasperating is Channel 32 - Fox Chicago and CBS-2 Chicago. Until the beginning of this year, 2006, for the last several years, Fox has listed an advertiser supporting closed captioning, and then provided no closed captioning at all. Sometimes in the middle of the 9:00 pm news, a line appears, almost totally unreadable and then it goes off. Since the first of this year, Fox has been offering closed captioning and pretty readable; but there are times when they forget and it isn't on at all or is not readable or only comes up part of the time during a broadcast. Next in line in terms of exasperation is CBS. In fact, CBS exasperates me the most. I sent an e-mail to Craig Ferguson many months ago, when his show was starting up, thanking him for providing readable closed captioning. Thereafter, for a period of several months, he and Letterman were very good about providing it and providing it in readable form. Lately, however, Ferguson's show is not providing it at all and Letterman's show either doesn't have it or it is so unreadable, I will switch in exasperation to the Jay Leno or Conan O'Brien shows on NBC-Chicago Channel 5 which programs I do not care for as much but they pretty consistently provide readable closed captioning.

Channel 7 Chicago (ABC) is the most outstandingly consistent provider of closed captioning and closed captioning that is readable. I have no complaints about Channel 7 - ABC. However, all the programs I want to watch are not on ABC.

Channel 44, a Spanish affiliate of NBC, is pretty good about providing it. Also, on Channel 60, a Spanish station in Chicago-Aurora, if I watch a particular program which is on a lot (la scandale or el scandalo), they are very good about providing legends which are readable for each personality they are reporting on so I know what's going on. On Channel 23-Chicago, they usually re-run slapstick comedies which are enjoyable whether or not they provide closed captioning (which generally they do not). Channel 28-Chicago KBC, a Korean station as well as China Star which comes on Channel 23 sometimes are very, very good about providing captioning in both their native languages and English. However, CBS, sometimes NBC and WGN and Fox 32, frequently, are guilty - especially CBS, not only on Letterman and Ferguson but also on the news - of providing me with hyroglyphics, totally unreadable, or nothing at all.

While I confess to you my physical limitations are actually in the visual range but I live in a building where there is a noise curfew after 9pm and my TV does not accommodate wireless headphones, it does also help me visually to follow the program with the assist of closed captioning, for the sake of my eyes. At the same time, I am surprised no one from American Disabilities has come forward with a class-action suit on this matter. I suppose those who are hearing-impaired are so used to reading lips, maybe it doesn't matter to them. But for me, it is extremely annoying and exasperating.

Please give thought to this the next time you are reviewing the licenses of these stations and/or when other matters come up in the near future of a similar nature.

Thank you very much.

/Sarah Myers  
sam5105@earthlink.net or sarahmyers@loyolachicagoalum.net

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